

The Christian's Attachment to the House of his God.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
MEETING-HOUSE, IN WHITE-ROW,
SPITAL-FIELDS,

On WEDNESDAY, April 9th, 1794.

AT THE SEPARATION OF
THE REV. JOHN GOODE,
TO THE PASTORAL OFFICE IN THAT CHURCH.

By B. DAVIES, D.D.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHURCH,
AND OF THE MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS
PRESENT ON THE OCCASION.

L O N D O N :

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1794.



TO

The Reverend JOHN GOODE,

AND

TO THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS
OF THAT RESPECTABLE SOCIETY,

FOR WHOSE SPIRITUAL EDIFICATION HE LABORS IN
THE GOSPEL;

THIS PLAIN DISCOURSE,

PREACHED AND PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS,

(WITH THE MOST ARDENT WISHES FOR THEIR INCREASING
PROSPERITY AND COMFORT,)

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

N. B. *The Service of the Day was conducted in the following Order.*

The Rev. Mr. CLAYTON began with Prayer, and reading some suitable Portions of Scripture.

Rev. Mr. BARBER prayed.

The Sermon succeeded.

Rev. Mr. BREWER followed in Prayer. And

Rev. Mr. TOWLE concluded the Service.

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A

S E R M O N, &c.

TH E part allotted to me in the solemn service of this day, is to address the Members of this respectable Society, and to call their attention to those important duties by a conscientious discharge of which, their own advantage, as well as the comfort of their Pastor, will be best promoted. But before I proceed, I have been requested to drop some hints of information, for the satisfaction of the Pastors and Messengers of of Churches now assembled (a).

(a) Many churches, on similar occasions, have appointed a brother from among themselves to give an account of their proceedings, for the information of the pastors and messengers assembled. But in the present instance, another mode was preferred, viz. that the declaration should come from the pulpit.

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In the letter addressed to our several churches, some account was given of the steps pursued previous to the settlement which has taken place. I am now directed farther to add, that since the writing of that letter, a special church-meeting has been held; when the Rev. John Goode having made a public Declaration of his Faith in the great doctrines of the Gospel, to the entire satisfaction of the whole Church, was, in the first place, received into communion as a member of their society; and then, by the reciprocal declarations usual on such occasions, accompanied with solemn prayer, actually constituted the Pastor of this branch of the Church of Christ.

And now, my dear christian friends, I am persuaded that my brethren in the ministry here present, together with their messengers, not only approve of your order as conformable to apostolical practice; but, with the most ardent wishes for your prosperity, sincerely and affectionately congratulate you on a settlement which promises, through the divine blessing, to be followed by the most
happy

happy consequences. We all sympathized with the grief and distress you felt, when, by a very affecting and mysterious event of Providence, you were deprived of the edifying labours of a truly excellent and much-valued Pastor. And we now as sincerely participate in your joy, in that your eyes this day behold your Pastor.

But in the present address, you will expect more than congratulations. You see yourselves under peculiar obligations to the divine goodness, which has so remarkably appeared for you, and are naturally led to say, *What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits?* I shall endeavour, therefore, with all plainness and faithfulness, to set before you such hints of advice, as, by the blessing of God, may be profitable and useful. And as the foundation of what I shall say, permit me to refer you to a passage of scripture, which I trust you will unanimously adopt as your solemn resolution.

NEHEMIAH X. 39.

We will not forsake the house of our God.

WITH this sacred obligation the Jews were prevailed on to bind themselves, through the urgent and affectionate persuasions of Ezra and Nehemiah, in conjunction with others who were zealous for the honour of God, and friendly to the best interests of the people.

The work which was entrusted by providence to those good men, was great and arduous. In the circumstances of the Jews upon their release from captivity, it was a vast and difficult undertaking to rebuild the temple which had lain so long in ruins, and to repair the walls of Jerusalem. But when they had surmounted every obstacle, and their zeal and perseverance were crowned with success, they perceived that very little was gained, unless the people possessed a firm and affectionate attachment to the laws and ordinances of God. The temple would yield them

them no advantage, unless the Lord honoured it as his residence ; and the walls of Jerusalem would afford them no security, if the people were exposed to the inroads of sin and the spread of degeneracy.

Influenced, therefore, by this conviction, they entered with zeal and resolution on the great and necessary work of reformation ; and did all in their power to oppose an effectual barrier against the entrance of that enemy, which brings misery and ruin on nations as well as individuals. In order to this, they persuaded the people to enter into a solemn covenant, *that they would walk in God's law, and observe all his commandments, his judgments and statutes.* This covenant was confirmed by *a curse and an oath* (b). That is, the obligation was considered to be equally sacred and binding as the most solemn oath ; and, if it should be violated, they acknowledged themselves exposed to the dreadful curse of an offended God.

Several particulars, to which they bound themselves by this engagement, are specified

(b) Ver. 29.

in this chapter. And some of them may be adopted, with great propriety and advantage, by christian societies and individuals. Give me leave to mention the chief of them.

The colonies which the kings of Assyria had established in the land upon the captivity of the ten tribes, retained many of their former heathenish customs, and had never cordially embraced the laws and worship of the God of Israel. The Jews, therefore, now resolve to enter into no affinity or connexion with them. *We will not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons* (c).—Is there not reason to believe, that religion has suffered much, and that many christian societies have been greatly reduced, by the want of proper attention in professing parents to the spiritual advantage of their children, upon their entering into the most important connexions? Not only their principles as Dissenters, but their religion itself, has been too often sacrificed at the shrine of secular advantage. Surely, this is a matter that calls for serious lamentation.

(c) Ver. 30.

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The people of the land paid little or no regard to the Sabbath, and frequently profaned it by exposing the productions of their fields to sale on that sacred day. The Jews therefore laid themselves under a sacred obligation *not to purchase any provisions on the Sabbath*, whatever inconvenience they might thereby sustain (*d*).—Our forefathers were not more remarkable for any thing, than for a strict and sacred observance of the Lord's day. And is it not evident, that in proportion as that strictness is relaxed, and business or amusement is suffered to occupy those hours which should be dedicated to spiritual exercises, the life and power of religion fall into decay?

Another important matter which the Jews now bound themselves strictly to attend to, was, faithfully and punctually *to render the various contributions which were required by the law for the maintenance of the worship of the sanctuary* (*e*). It must be confessed, that the Levitical service imposed a heavy tribute upon them, though it cannot justly

(*d*) Ver. 31.(*e*) Ver. 32, 33.

be accounted rigorous or severe, as divine providence was engaged to bless them with prosperity, in proportion to their cheerful compliance with the ordinances of the law.—The worship of the Gospel imposes no such burdens on us, as the Jews now readily submitted to. And though our zeal is not to be excited by the expectation of *temporal blessings*; yet the *spiritual benefits* which we are encouraged to hope for, will be a powerful motive with every sincere Christian, readily to contribute his part for the support of the cause of God and of religion.

After specifying these and some other particulars, the substance of the whole is collected together and summed up in the solemn resolution contained in the text. *And we will not forsake the house of our God.*

You will, my Christian friends, allow me to say; *God hath done great things for you, whereof you are glad.* I am persuaded, that this grateful sentiment pervades all your minds. *Suffer, therefore, the word of exhortation,* whilst from this passage of scripture
I attempt

I attempt to shew, what is incumbent on you to do for God, as a reasonable acknowledgment of the goodness he has shewn to you. And in order to this, permit me to call your attention to the following things ;

I. The important object which demands your affectionate and zealous regard. *The House of our God.*

II. The respect necessary to be paid to it. *We will not forsake it.*

III. The reasons which should influence and constrain every Christian to adopt this resolution ; *We will not forsake the House of our God.*

I. The important object, which demands your affectionate and zealous regard, is *the House of our God.*

It is evident, that by these words the Jews meant to express *the temple of God at Jerusalem.* The magnificent structure erected by Solomon had been laid in ruins by the Chaldeans. But now another building was raised
on

on the same foundation, and for the same sacred purposes. And though it was far inferior in many respects to the former temple, yet it was no less the House of God, and was, therefore, sacred and venerable in their account. But when they mentioned *the House of their God*, together with the idea of the building, they connected that of the *sacred work* which was to be performed in it, as well as of the *persons* who, by divine appointment, were to minister therein. This was the object to which they promised a sacred regard.

But in the language of the New Testament, *the House of God* is to be understood in a more *spiritual* sense; of which we have an instance in the Apostle's address to Timothy. *That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the House of God, which is the Church of the living God (f).*—The temple in which God now resides is composed of sincere believers, who, as *lively stones built on Christ* the only foundation, are *an habitation of God through the Spirit*. Yet, the idea of

(f) 1 Tim. iii. 15.

a material building is not absolutely excluded. For the Church is an *assembly* of believers; and an assembly requires *some place to meet in*. In this respect, great inconvenience has been sustained by the Church of Christ in different ages. By the rage of persecutors, Christians have been often deprived of the privilege of assembling in places set apart for public worship, and conveniently fitted for that purpose. Gladly have they embraced the opportunity of meeting in a barn or a cottage, or in some sequestered spot in the very heart of a forest. For wherever spiritual worship is offered to God, it is *his House*. The presence of God has often converted the most dreary spot into a *Bethel, the House of God, and the gate of heaven*.

But our lot has fallen in happier times. We know little or nothing of persecution, but from the report of history. Not only are we permitted to assemble for worship without interruption or fear; but we meet in decent and convenient houses, provided with every accommodation we can reasonably desire. May our conduct towards God and towards men
never

never be such as will justly forfeit so great a privilege!—Yet, though the idea of a building appropriated to divine worship be not absolutely excluded, the House of God principally denotes *a Christian Church*; a sacred society composed of sincere believers. With what propriety it is so denominated, will sufficiently appear from a few remarks.—*A House* sometimes intends *a building designed for an habitation*; and sometimes *the Family which dwells in it*. In both these senses, the Church is the House of God.

For it is a spiritual edifice built by the Lord, and he claims it as his peculiar property. Accordingly, the Apostle says to the Corinthians, *Ye are God's building* (g).—The universe is a stupendous building erected by him; and it discovers many evidences of his wisdom and power and goodness. But it is composed of perishable materials, and, because of sin, its final dissolution is decreed. Now, there is another more excellent structure, which will stand as an everlasting monument to the honor of all the perfections of

(g) 1 Cor. iii. 9.

God; and that is his Church. The raising of that sacred fabric was the grand object of his counsels before the foundation of the world; and he has a particular respect to it in all the dispensations of his providence. It is made up of those who were once sinners, guilty, polluted and miserable; but being redeemed by the death of Christ, washed in his precious blood, and renewed by the holy Spirit, they are prepared to be lively stones in that building, which rests on Christ as its glorious foundation.

The whole of this divine fabric no man has ever seen; but we shall have a complete and delightful view of it, when Christ will present it to the Father on the last day as a finished work, *without blemish and without spot*. However, we are able to form some idea of the whole, from those parts of it which fall within the reach of our observation. A society of Christians formed after the model prescribed in the Gospel, maintaining and professing its glorious truths, having their spirit and conversation regulated according to its precepts, and walking in its ordinances
and

and institutions, may be considered as a representation or image of the whole Church. In the present state, it falls far short of that perfection which shall at last adorn it. But amidst all its defects, and under all the meanness and obscurity which cover it, the Lord claims it as his own. *This people have I formed for myself (b). The Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance (i).* And on the last day he will acknowledge it in a more illustrious manner. *They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels (k).*

The Church is also denominated *the House of God*, because it is *the residence of his family*, of the spiritual children who are *born again* of his grace. When we read of *the House of God*, our thoughts are very naturally led to consider the family, whose honor and privilege it is to dwell there. And we are assured, that it is an habitation prepared *for his children; who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of*

(b) Isa. xliii. 21.

(i) Deut. xxxii. 9.

(k) Mal. iii. 17.

God (l). To enjoy the excellent privileges of *the House of God*, the grand qualification which is absolutely necessary is *regeneration*. If that be wanting, its noblest entertainments cannot be relished, and its richest enjoyments will be despised. But to those who are *born from above*, no situation can be so agreeable or pleasing as *the House of God*. David has described the uniform sentiments of the whole family of God. *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple (m). Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever (n).*

But there is another consideration which shews with what propriety the Church is called *the House of God*, inasmuch as *Jehovah himself has chosen to dwell in it. For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it (o).* In an infe-

(l) John i. 13.
xxiii. 6.

(m) Psalm xxvii. 4.
(o) Psalm cxxxii. 13, 14.

(n) Psalm.

rior sense, these words are applicable to *Mount Zion in Jerusalem*, where the temple stood, for it was God's sacred residence for many ages. But when the Jews impiously rejected *him*, of whom the temple was only a type, they were told, *Behold your house is left unto you desolate* (p). And when God removes his presence, the most splendid temple is given up to desolation.

But as long as any society retains the essential characters of a Christian Church, God owns it as his House, and honors it as his residence. In the immensity of his Being, God is every where present, and *fills heaven and earth*. But his gracious presence is the peculiar privilege of his Church. And it not only imports the special *relation* in which he stands to it, with the *love* and *regard* he bears to it; but that it is favored with the kindest manifestations of his *power* and *grace*. It is this that puts a peculiar solemnity on the ordinances of divine worship; and to this must be ascribed their entire efficacy for the important purposes they are designed to answer. Whenever a mind that was involved in

(p) Matt. xxiii. 38.

spiritual

spiritual ignorance is illuminated by the light of divine truth ; whenever an obdurate heart is melted in repentance, and taught to bow to the authority and grace of Christ ; whenever a heavy-laden soul obtains relief from its intolerable burdens, and enjoys peace and consolation in believing ; it is an evidence of the presence of the Lord. Accordingly, after the prophet Ezekiel had given an emblematical description of the Gospel-Church, under the idea of a beautiful city, he concludes the account by saying ; *the name of the city from that day shall be, Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there (q).*

But the Church most evidently appears to be *the House of our God*, as it enjoys his most peculiar care and inspection, and is favored with every provision conducive to its welfare and prosperity.—When *the tribes of Israel* were actually separated to be *a Church for God*, and that form of worship was established, in which he was to be acknowledged as their God ; the regulations according to which it was to be conducted, were not left to be set-

(q) Ezek. xlviii. 35.

tled by human contrivance, but every particular was decreed by divine authority. Therefore, that charge was given to Moses; *See that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount* (r). Moses was invested with a higher commission than any of the prophets which succeeded him under the Old Testament; he was distinguished by very eminent gifts and abilities; and God himself acknowledged, that *as a servant he was faithful in all his house* (s). And yet Moses was not allowed to appoint one institution without the express command of God. If, therefore, we acknowledge the dispensation of the Gospel to be more excellent than that of the law; we shall require no farther proof, that the constitution of a Gospel-Church, and the regulation of its worship and discipline, are not left to be settled by the fancy or judgment of men; but that it is our duty to conform to the model prescribed in the New Testament. It is impious to suppose, that the work of God can derive any improvement from the wisdom of man.

(r) Heb. viii. 5.

(s) Chap. iii. 5.

And

And if we examine the contents of the sacred scriptures, we shall see the utmost reason to confess, that God has manifested the greatest attention to the order and welfare of his House, in favoring it with so rich a treasure. For they contain a full and clear revelation of those sacred and divine truths, the belief and profession of which constitute the foundation of a Christian Church. And were men disposed to submit to the *oracles of God*, the use of *human formularies* would be entirely superseded, and *theological controversies* would be at an end.

Nor are the scriptures less explicit with respect to those *ordinances of worship*, in which God receives a spiritual homage from his people, and by which their edification and comfort are promoted.—The character also of those, who have a just claim to be received as members of a Christian Church, is plainly delineated; and every necessary direction is given, how they may glorify God by a well-ordered conversation, and promote each other's edification as brethren in the Lord.—What officers ought to be appointed in *the House*

of God ; what are their proper qualifications ; and what the services in which they are to be employed, may be learnt with equal satisfaction from the same source.

But the care which the Lord has taken of his House consists not merely in the instructions he has granted in these important respects ; for he has engaged to provide for his people *pastors according to his own heart, which shall feed them with knowledge and understanding* (t). Far be it from me, to deny the expediency of a regular and learned education for the work of the ministry. Yet, I hesitate not to assert, that the sacred gifts by which the *House of God* is edified and fed, are not acquired by human erudition, but conferred by the holy Spirit. And all the colleges and universities of the world could not prevent a *famine* there, were it not that God is faithful to the promise to which we just now referred.

But God's care of his House extends farther still ; for he has promised *to be present*

(t) Jer. iii. 15.

in his Churches by his Spirit, to render the means he has appointed efficacious. When our blessed Lord had invested his apostles, with a divine commission to preach his Gospel and administer his ordinances, he added a gracious promise for the encouragement of their zeal and fidelity, saying, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* (u). To this promise, the preservation and prosperity of the Church are owing to this day; and it will insure its continuance until the final appearance of Christ to judge the world.

And do you not, my christian brethren, stand here this day as witnesses to the goodness and faithfulness of God in this respect? After all the changes which have taken place in your society, and after the many breaches which death has made, by the removal of members, church-officers, or pastors; that you remain still a numerous, an affectionate and harmonious Church, and are once more settled under a Pastor, the object of your unanimous choice; surely in all this you cannot but discern and acknowledge the good-

(u) Matt. xxviii. 20,

ness of the Lord. Influenced, therefore, with those grateful sentiments which the present auspicious occasion must inspire, you will, I doubt not, cheerfully attend to our next subject of enquiry; viz.

II. What is the respect we are required to pay to the House of our God? *We will not forsake the House of our God.*—And I trust you will not be displeased, if I take the liberty of mentioning it as your solemn determination by divine grace,

That you will diligently and constantly attend on the sacred duties and ordinances of the House of God. This is enforced by an *apostolical injunction*; *Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (x).* It is also recommended by *the example of the first Christian Church. They continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers (y).* And it is incumbent on you as a *sacred homage* to

(x) Heb. x. 25.

(y) Acts ii. 42.

your

your God and Saviour. When so many are industrious in degrading the personal dignity of the Saviour, and in depreciating his saving work; will not you embrace every opportunity of declaring, that *you glory in his cross*?—As you acknowledge Christ to be your *divine Master*, how proper must it appear, that you should attend with meekness and humility to those *counsels and instructions* by which your disposition and conduct are to be regulated? Depending entirely on divine communications, for those supplies of grace which will enable your souls to prosper; how necessary must it be, that *the sacrifice of prayer and praise* should be constantly presented in the name of Christ?—And is it not highly expedient, that you should frequently recognize that solemn act, by which *you said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord*?

The danger of our being deficient in this part of the respect we owe to the House of our God, arises chiefly from our being exposed to the prevalence of a *negligent and lukewarm spirit*. When once we have lost our relish for the provisions of God's House,

and they no longer afford us spiritual entertainment; it is an awful proof of a declension in religion, that we have *left our first love*.—But many professors are tempted to leave their proper seats empty in the House of God, through the influence of *a vain curiosity*. For my own part, I have not the least doubt, but that, if solid edification were the object sought, they would find it rather in the Church with which they are connected, than in roving from place to place. An endless variety may gratify *itching ears*; but merely to be *entertained* is not to be *edified*.—I therefore persuade myself that, in this respect, *you will not forsake the House of your God*. And will you not permit me to add,

That you will cordially unite in every measure calculated to promote the prosperity of that branch of the Church of God, with which you are more immediately connected. I hope it is an earnest of your being preserved as an increasing and flourishing society, that divine Providence has so mercifully appeared for you in the present settlement; and that, by a divine blessing on the faithful labors of

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your Pastor, not only your own souls will be greatly refreshed and edified, but many strangers excited to desire a place with you in the House of God.

But you must allow me to observe, that it is in your power to afford very considerable assistance to your Minister, by concurring with him in every measure that tends to the welfare of the society. Would it not greatly conduce to the prosperity of our Churches, if all the members were to exert themselves to promote religion in their own families, so that each of them might become *a church in a house*?—May not individual members contribute their part towards preserving the peace and harmony of the whole body, and in diffusing a spirit of christian love?—May you not afford considerable assistance to your Pastor and other officers in maintaining that sacred discipline, which is so necessary to support the honor of religion, and to maintain order and purity in the House of our God?—In a word: may you not afford peculiar assistance *by your affectionate and fervent prayers? The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth*

availeth much (z). If, therefore, you hope that you have some interest at the throne of grace, for what purpose will you employ it, rather than in imploring a divine blessing on your Minister, and on the sacred Ordinances which he administers?—And may I not venture to say yet further,

That you will be always ready to contribute liberally and cheerfully, as the Lord will enable you, to the support of his cause and the maintenance of his house. It has been observed already, what a burden the Jews submitted to in this respect. The value of what was entirely consumed on the altar was very considerable, besides the contributions necessary for the support of the *Priests*, the *Levites* and the *Nethinims*, or *the posterity of the Gibeonites*, who were made *bewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of God*. All these ministered in the house of God, and there they had their maintenance.

But in this as well as in other respects, *the yoke of Christ is easy and his burden light*.

(z) James v. 16.

In

In proportion, therefore, as the tribute imposed on Christians for the house of their God is more moderate, it should be rendered with the greater cheerfulness. But this is a point on which there is no necessity that I should insist farther, in addressing you. Your former Pastor received substantial proofs of your steady attachment, your warm affection and constant liberality. The poor in God's family have long experienced the effects of the sympathy you feel for their distresses. And many ministers and churches in the country have enjoyed the fruits of your generous contributions. In this respect, therefore, I have the fullest persuasion, that *you will not forsake the house of your God.*—Shall I add once more,

That you will not be tempted rashly or sinfully to dissolve your connexion with that part of the Church of God with which you are united. I will not deny but that circumstances may happen, which may render it expedient for a member of one church to transfer his relation to another. I only mean to say, that such a measure ought not to be adopted without serious consideration, and
without

without substantial reasons. But how common is it for the bonds of christian fellowship to be dissolved merely through the influence of *humour*, of *pride*, or a *fickle spirit*. Such inconstant professors do not reflect, how much they weaken the hands of the ministers of Christ, instead of endeavouring, as it is their duty, to alleviate the burdens which they necessarily feel. But the pleasing unanimity which at present subsists among you is, I trust, a happy presage and earnest, that my honoured brother has no such trial to fear from any of you.

Then surely I may indulge a hope, that none of this society will *forsake the house of their God* in so criminal a manner, as to *return again to the ways of sin*, or to *pass over into the tabernacles of error*. The best of us may improve to our advantage that serious caution, *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall* (a). We are encompassed with many temptations to sin; we are not ignorant of many evil principles remaining in our own hearts; and there are many affecting examples to remind us of the instability

(a) 1 Cor. x. 12.

and weakness of the best of men; when left to themselves.—But whilst the fear of God presides in our hearts, and our faith relies on his covenant and promises, we may rejoice in an interest in that encouraging declaration; *the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms (b)*. Thus armed and protected, we shall be able to repel all *the fiery darts of the wicked*.

There are temptations also by which we are solicited *to relinquish the truths of the gospel*, and to embrace those erroneous principles, which flatter the pride of the human heart. And many, concerning whom better hopes were entertained, have been carried away by them, to the no small grief and disappointment of the ministers and churches with which they were connected. But as long as we retain a lively conviction of the evil of sin, with a deep sense of our absolute need of *salvation, and that from God*; whilst we maintain a strict intimacy with the sacred scriptures, and with humility and earnestness supplicate the illumination and guidance of

(b) Deut. xxxiii. 27.

the Holy Spirit ; we are encouraged to hope, that we shall not be permitted so to *forsake the house of our God.*

I proposed to add,

III. The reasons which should influence every Christian to adopt this solemn resolution ; *we will not forsake the house of our God.*

Under this branch of our subject it would not be difficult to collect a variety of arguments, the force of which must be felt by every good man. But as I have already taken up so much time, and as I am persuaded, that what has been recommended is regarded by you as your *duty* and *privilege*, I shall content myself with only suggesting a few hints.

And will it not have great weight with you, that what demands your pious regard is the *house of your God?* Is it not to be considered as an unspeakable privilege, that the great Jehovah should assume the title of Our God? How infinite the condescension on his part? And what a rich spring of consolation and happiness

happiness is thereby opened to us? Bring together all the promises of the gospel; unfold all the treasures of the everlasting covenant; and they will be found all comprehended in this one privilege, to *have the Lord for our God*. But how are creatures so vile and unworthy admitted, to so honourable and endearing a relation to the blessed God? The answer to this question will be a subject of everlasting admiration and praise, to all the inhabitants of heaven. It is in consequence of the unparalleled humiliation of the only-begotten Son of God; *who, though he was rich, for our sake became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich (c)*. Embracing with a steady faith this evangelical principle, you must feel your obligations to the love of God to be infinite. And his love will constrain you, to maintain an affectionate regard and attachment to his house. The blessed God can receive no benefit from his creatures. *Our goodness extendeth not to him (d)*. But he has a *house* and a *family* in the world, which is capable of receiving some advantage from your kindness. Therefore, his address to you

(c) 2 Cor. viii. 9.

(d) Psal. xvi. 2.

this day is, “ If you love me, *forsake not my house.*”

Again; Is not *the house of your God* the place where, in a very important sense, *you were born and nourished*? Most persons feel a considerable attachment to the place which gave them their birth. To an indifferent person, it may appear to have little to recommend it; yet, being the spot where we drew our first breath, we feel a strong partiality for it, which neither time nor absence is able totally to destroy.

But of how much greater importance is a *spiritual birth* by divine grace? *That* is the blessed change, by which sinners become the children of God, and are constituted the *heirs of heaven*. Now, to *the house of God* belongs the honour of being the *birth-place of the saints*. For, of Zion it shall be said, *this and that man was born in her, and the Highest himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there* (e). Have you, my friends,

(e) Psalm lxxxvii. 5, 6.

a comfortable hope and persuasion, that you have experienced that renovation, which is the only introduction to a place in the family of God? Then, I am certain, his house will have a strong and abiding interest in your affections. For, was it not *there* that God first met with you, and awakened you out of your dangerous and fatal security? Was it not there your acquaintance with Christ commenced? Was it not *there* the balm of the covenant was applied to heal the deadly wounds of your souls? And is it not *there* you have been fed and nourished with *the word of life* unto this day?—As for those, whose religion is altogether superficial, who have never experienced the power of the gospel in their hearts; when strong temptations accost them, they may be persuaded to go away. But such as are really *born from above* cannot so easily be seduced to *forsake the house of their God*. Turning with abhorrence from the temptation, and fixing their eyes on the Saviour, they will say: *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life* (f).

(f) John vi. 68.

D

And

And are not your *nearest* and *most endeared* *connexions* in the house of your God? Is it not the residence of your kindred and brethren? That man is considered as unnatural, and as having divested himself of the tender feelings of humanity, who discovers no affectionate attachment to his nearest *connexions*, the partners of his blood.—But the affinity which grace establishes betwixt sincere Christians is, in some respects, more intimate and endearing, than what subsists amongst the nearest earthly relatives. For all temporal *connexions* will soon be dissolved; whereas the union which is founded in religion cannot be destroyed by the stroke of death, but will remain indissoluble through eternity. As, therefore, the saints are all *brethren in the Lord*, children of the same heavenly father, and members of the same chosen family; this consideration cannot fail of inspiring them with ardent affection for *the house of their God*. And the Psalmist mentions it as one reason of his fervent wishes for *the prosperity of Jerusalem*. *For my brethren and companion's sake, I will now say, peace be within thee (g).*

(g) Psalm cxxii. 8.

—And

—And will not you adopt the same sentiments and say: “ In *the house of our God* are
 “ found *the excellent of the earth*. There
 “ dwell the children of our heavenly Father,
 “ and our brethren in the best bonds. We
 “ highly value their friendship and love, and
 “ esteem their fellowship a peculiar blessing.
 “ We feel the greatest respect and affection
 “ for them, and hope to remain for ever in
 “ their society. Therefore, on their account,
 “ *we will not forsake the house of our God.*”

Permit me to observe, once more, that the house of God on earth stands in the closest connexion with that nobler house above, where you hope through grace to dwell for ever. Great is the goodness of the Lord, in preparing such a house for the residence of his children upon earth, and in furnishing it with such abundant provisions for their entertainment and comfort. But a mansion infinitely more glorious, and which is the seat of perfect and everlasting blessedness, is reserved for them above. With the assured hope of this, Christ comforted his disciples, when their hearts were oppressed with

grief at the prospect of his departure from them. *In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also* (b). To have an everlasting residence in that heavenly habitation, is the highest object of a Christian's desire; and the expectation of it is his chiefest cordial under all the trials and sorrows of the present state.

But, *who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place* (i)? The palace of heaven will open its gates to admit those only, who have chosen God's house on earth for their habitation. It is their study and delight now *to walk with God*; they approve of *the holy rules and orders* of his family; they desire with their whole hearts to conform to them; and in the sacred duties and ordinances of religion, they enjoy the highest delight and entertainment. — These are the persons to whom God will

(b) John xiv. 2, 3.

(i) Psalm xxiv. 3.

soon say, “ *Come up hither, and occupy the
“ seats prepared for you in my immediate
“ presence.*”

But for *those* who despise the provisions of his house, and have no taste for its solemn services; who hate the laws prescribed for the regulation and government of his family; who have no desire to enjoy his presence, but prefer to live at the greatest distance from him;—for *them* a dismal mansion is prepared, the seat of absolute misery, unmixed with the least particle of good. For the sentence to be pronounced against them is already written; *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* (k).—Influenced by such considerations as have been now set before you, taught by divine grace, and *drawn with the cords of love*, I trust it will be your firm and unalterable resolution, *never to forsake the house of your God.*

And, to close the whole; let your devout meditations frequently anticipate the happy

(k) Matt. xxv. 41.

hour,

hour, when each of you in succession shall be called away from earth, to be united with the family above. Then shall you again see those *men of God*, who were once *over you in the Lord*, and who *travailed in birth for you 'till Christ was formed in your hearts*. And how delightful the interview both to them and to you!—Then shall you be reunited to those, *with whom you often took sweet counsel*, and whose edifying fellowship you enjoyed in the ways of God, but who *have fallen asleep in Jesus*. And how pleasing will it be, to review together the various trials you endured, as well as the manifold experience you had of the grace and faithfulness of your God and Saviour!

In the mean time, while you remain in God's house on earth, may you continually grow in grace, in holiness and spirituality! May a spirit of harmony, peace and love, prevail more and more among you! May your honoured Pastor long hold his station with you, and be made very useful and happy for many years! May you be still preserved a truly respectable and flourishing Church; a
pattern

pattern to other churches for a steady attachment to the faith and order of the Gospel! And I will venture to add, that whilst you maintain a constant zeal for truth and holiness, for the order, the purity and the welfare of *the house of your God*; I shall express the affectionate sentiment and prayer of all my brethren in the ministry, as well as my own, in saying, *the Lord be with you all.* Amen.

F I N I S.

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 Amen.



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